INL News Release
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Team identifies likely cause of INL lab fire

A team investigating a small laboratory fire involving red phosphorus at an Idaho National Laboratory facility June 12 has concluded the likely cause was either static electricity, friction, or a spark from a tool. The resulting flash fire was contained inside a fume hood in the laboratory. Cleanup of the lab has been completed.

A chemist was using a funnel to transfer the red phosphorous – in a fine powder form – from one container to another when the fire occurred. The chemist was wearing protective clothing, including two pairs of gloves, and safety glasses with side shields. She received a very minor burn to one hand and inhaled some fumes. She was treated, evaluated and released from medical facilities.

Work with the red phosphorous is currently suspended, and no restart date for the work has been set. The investigating team identified several opportunities for improving the identification and control of chemical hazards in lab activities. When the work resumes, additional measures will be put in place to prevent a reoccurrence.

The amount of red phosphorous being handled was about two pounds, not one ounce as reported earlier.

The red phosphorous was to be used to test equipment designed to detect concealed explosives.

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